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**Preliminary 1999 Acceptable Biological Catch (ABC) and
Optimum Yield (OY) Recommendations
for the Pacific Coast Groundfish Fishery**

by

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Abstract

Five stock assessments were completed in 1998 and reviewed at the September meeting of the Pacific Fishery Management Council: sablefish, shortspine thornyhead, blackgill rockfish, Pacific ocean perch, and chilipepper rockfish. The Council adopted a preliminary 1999 sablefish ABC of 9,692 mt, a substantial increase over the 5,200 mt ABC in place in 1998. The ABC for shortspine thornyhead will be near 1998 levels, increasing from 1,000 mt to 1,261 mt. For the first time, the ABC for Pacific ocean perch in the Vancouver and Columbia areas will be set above zero (due to adoption of the new harvest policy in Amendment 11 to the Pacific Coast Groundfish Fishery Management Plan); the preliminary ABC is 695 mt, slightly above the 1998 landed catch harvest guideline. The blackgill rockfish assessment for the Conception area is the first one prepared for this species and resulted in a preliminary ABC recommendation of 365 mt. (The ABC for Aother rockfish,≡ which previously included blackgill rockfish, is reduced by 365 mt in the southern area.) Chilipepper rockfish was reassessed this year, and the GMT calculated ABC for the Eureka, Monterey and Conception areas to be 3,724 mt, slightly above the current 3,400 mt ABC. All other ABCs are expected to remain unchanged in 1999.

Preliminary 1999 Acceptable Biological Catch (ABC) and Optimum Yield (OY) Recommendations for the Pacific Coast Groundfish Fishery by Jim Glock

Preliminary ABC Recommendations. Five stock assessments were completed in 1998 and reviewed at the September meeting of the Pacific Fishery Management Council: sablefish, shortspine thornyhead, blackgill rockfish, Pacific ocean perch, and chilipepper rockfish. Each of these resulted in new preliminary ABC estimates. The Council adopted a preliminary 1999 sablefish ABC of 9,692 mt, a substantial increase over the 5,200 mt ABC in place in 1998. The Groundfish Management Team (GMT) reported the stock biomass is currently estimated to be approximately 37% of its unfished level, slightly below the 40% precautionary threshold established by Amendment 11 to the Pacific Coast Groundfish Fishery Management Plan. The sablefish ABC is based on using the $F_{35\%}$ harvest rate and applies to the entire coast north of the Conception management area (36°N latitude). The ABC for shortspine thornyhead will be near 1998 levels, increasing from 1,000 mt to 1,261 mt. The GMT estimates the current shortspine biomass to be about 34% of its unfished level. The shortspine ABC is based on use of the $F_{35\%}$ harvest rate. The ABC for this species also applies north of the Conception area in 1999 (it extended slightly farther south, to Point Conception, in 1998). For the first time, the ABC for Pacific ocean perch in the Vancouver and Columbia areas will be set above zero (due to adoption of the new harvest policy in Amendment 11); the preliminary ABC is 695 mt, slightly above the 1998 landed catch harvest guideline. The GMT estimates the current biomass to be about 13% of its unfished level. The ABC is based on the $F_{40\%}$ harvest rate, which is the default value for rockfish in the genus *Sebastes*. The blackgill rockfish assessment for the Conception area is the first one prepared for this species and resulted in a preliminary ABC recommendation of 365 mt, based on the $F_{40\%}$ harvest rate. (The ABC for Aother rockfish,≡ which previously included blackgill rockfish, is reduced by 365 mt in the southern area.) The GMT calculates the stock biomass is at about 51% of its unfished spawning level. Chilipepper rockfish was reassessed this year, and the GMT calculated ABC for the Eureka, Monterey and Conception areas to be 3,724 mt, slightly above the current 3,400 mt ABC. The chilipepper stock is estimated to be about 60% of its pristine spawning level, which places it above the default Aprecautionary threshold≡ of 40% of its unfished level. All other ABCs are expected to remain unchanged in 1999.

Preliminary OY/Harvest Guideline Recommendations.

The Council proposed several changes to harvest levels for 1998 as a result of adoption of the Amendment 11 harvest policy. The preliminary sablefish OY is 7,919 mt for total catch, an increase over the 5,200 mt harvest guideline for 1998. Two sablefish assessments were prepared in 1998 and, although the results were similar, each one calculated a substantial range of biomass estimates. The GMT combined the results to devel

op a Arisk-neutral \cong ABC recommendation. Although the preliminary ABC is based on the $F_{35\%}$ harvest rate, the preliminary OY is based on the $F_{40\%}$ harvest rate to address uncertainty in the biomass estimates. The shortspine thornyhead preliminary OY is a range based on the $F_{40\%}$ and $F_{35\%}$ harvest rates (991 mt and 1,175 mt, respectively) for total catch (ABC is based on $F_{35\%}$). The stock is currently estimated to be about 34% of the unfished level, but there is substantial uncertainty in the assessment. The landed catch equivalents reflect a 30% discard estimate. The longspine thornyhead OY would remain at 4,102 mt, the same as the 1998 harvest guideline, applying north of the Conception management area. This stock is estimated to be above 40% of its unfished spawning biomass, but harvest is restricted due to bycatch of shortspine thornyhead. The coastwide Dover sole stock is believed to be above the default precautionary threshold of 40% of the unfished biomass, and both the ABC and landed catch OY/harvest guideline will be the same as in 1998: (9,426 mt and 8,955 mt, respectively).

The lingcod ABC (U.S. only) will remain at 960 mt, but the OY/harvest guideline could be reduced to zero due to the overfished condition of the stock. The GMT estimates this stock currently has only about 8.8% of its original egg production potential. The current coastwide ABC was established based on the assumption that stock declines in California and southern Oregon were similar to those observed in the Vancouver and Columbia areas. However, the California Department of Fish and Game (CDFG) presented a report to the Council suggesting the lingcod decline in California has not been as severe as in the northern area. CDFG suggested that fishing regulations for the southern areas may not need to be as restrictive as in the north. The Council will consider minimal catch and landing allowances at the November meeting that would result in an OY greater than zero. Therefore, the preliminary OY is a range from zero to the ABC (zero to 960 mt). If the Council chooses to deviate from the default harvest policy and set the OY above zero, it will consider how the decision would affect the time necessary for the stock to rebuild. The Council will need to develop a formal rebuilding plan for this and other overfished stocks within the next year.

The Pacific ocean perch preliminary OY/harvest guideline for total catch is 214 mt, which could result in a landed catch OY near zero. The GMT tentatively applied the 16% discard adjustment used for several other rockfish species, resulting in a landed catch estimate of 180 mt. However, the Scientific and Statistical Committee pointed out that a 16% discard estimate appears unreasonably low, especially for the extremely low trip limits necessary to achieve this OY.

For widow rockfish, the coastwide ABC will remain at 5,750 mt, based on the $F_{40\%}$ harvest rate. The total catch OY would be 5,023 mt compared to the 1998 harvest guideline of 4,960 mt. The widow rockfish population is estimated to be at about 29% of its unfished spawning potential at this time. For 1999, the GMT proposes calculating the preliminary landed catch amount differently than in the past, applying the open access allocation percentage to the total catch value rather than taking discard Aoff the top, \cong and then subtracting an amount for anticipated discard in the at-sea whiting fishery. The differences in the amounts calculated by the different approaches are relatively minor. The Council will review this proposal in November when it develops final recommendations.

The preliminary ABC for the Sebastes complex in the Vancouver and Columbia areas would remain

unchanged at 8,647 mt, but the total catch OY would be 6,344 mt, compared to 7,057 mt total catch in 1998. The OY reflects a reduction in the northern bocaccio ABC estimate and an uncertainty reduction for other *Sebastes* species due to lack of stock status information. The preliminary OY is calculated using a 50% reduction in ABCs for species without stock assessment information and a 25% reduction for species that were addressed in previous assessments. Yellowtail rockfish is included in the ABC and OY; the yellowtail rockfish (U.S.) ABC would remain at 3,465 mt, based on the $F_{40\%}$ harvest rate. The preliminary OY is based on 90% of the $F_{40\%}$ rate due to uncertainty in stock condition: the total catch OY would be 3,091 mt compared to the 1998 total catch harvest guideline of 3,118 mt. The canary rockfish ABC would remain at 1,045 mt with the total catch OY at 929 mt. The landed catch amounts for yellowtail and canary rockfish would be calculated in the same way as for widow rockfish.

For the *Sebastes* complex in the Eureka, Monterey and Conception areas, OY reductions are proposed, although the ABC is increased from 8,999 mt up to 9,323 mt. The total catch OY would be a range of 5,126 mt to 7,080 mt, depending on the Council's final decisions on chilipepper and bocaccio rockfish. For chilipepper, the GMT recommends establishing an OY of 2,000 mt, which is near the 1992-1997 average landed catch level and below the 3,724 mt ABC. This recommendation is based on concerns about the stock and the likely bycatch of bocaccio, which occurs in many landings. The GMT expressed concern that recent chilipepper recruitment has been poor and that the 5-year projection indicates the biomass will fall below the precautionary threshold if recruitment remains poor. The 2,000 mt OY is roughly equivalent to the $F_{60\%}$ harvest rate. The Council will also consider setting the OY at the $F_{40\%}$ level (3,724 mt) in accordance with the default harvest policy. Establishment of an OY for chilipepper will likely require allocation between open access and limited entry sectors. For bocaccio, the ABC would remain at 230 mt (based on $F_{40\%}$), but the stock is only about 7% of its pristine size. This places the stock in the overfished category, and the default harvest policy would set the OY at zero. However, the Council will consider a minimal catch and landing allowance for bocaccio at its November meeting. Thus, the preliminary OY is a range of 0 - 230 mt (i.e., up to the ABC) to provide flexibility to address discard of unavoidable bycatch in commercial and recreational fisheries. The Council will consider the effects of allowing harvest above the default level on the rebuilding rate. For blackgill rockfish, the Council does not intend to establish an OY at this time. However, the Stock Assessment Review Panel expressed concern over exceeding a harvest of 150 - 250 mt, so the GMT recommended establishing a point of concern at 300 mt for the Conception area. Landings above this level would trigger a re-evaluation of fishing regulations and stock condition. The Council has not yet formally endorsed the point of concern. The GMT has recommended a 25% to 50% reduction in the contribution to OY of other species in the southern *Sebastes* complex, due to uncertainty in stock status.